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FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3523
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9375
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE 3184
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 0783
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 7337
RHHMUNA/USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0424

C O N F I D E N T I A L JAKARTA 005484

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SECSTATE FOR EAP/IET AND DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/01/2016

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SUBJECT: BURMESE REFUGEES PUT GOI IN TOUGH SPOT

Classified By: Political Officer Lissa McAtee, reason 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (SBU) A boatload of 77 Burmese men landed April 25 on an island off the coast of Aceh on their way to Malaysia. The Indonesian Navy found the Burmese after a storm blew their boat off course. The government of Indonesian (GOI) is in a tight spot as they weigh the political sensitivities in deciding what to do with the refugees.

¶2. (C) A source at the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) (protect) told us that they sent an official to the island of Sabang to determine the aspiration of the 77 Burmese refugees. Language barriers (the 77 are ethnic Rohingyas) made it difficult for UNHCR to conduct thorough interviews but they ascertained that the refugees wish to continue to Malaysia and probably left Burma for largely economic reasons. UNHCR said that the GOI would prefer to allow the Burmese to continue in their boats to Malaysia but should the refugees befall an ill fate en route, it would be an embarrassment for the Indonesians.

¶3. (C) UNHCR suggested to us that a Burmese refugee would have a strong asylum claim given the on-going human rights abuses in Burma but they cannot process asylum claims for refugees that do not request it. UNHCR quietly approached the Indonesian government on April 28 for their concurrence to send an UNCHR team to interview the 77 Burmese as possible asylum cases. UNHCR expects the Indonesian government to provide an answer by May 2. Our contact was sensitive to Indonesia's desire to handle the case discreetly rather than be seen by the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) as commenting on the human rights condition in Burma.

(Note: Although our UNHCR contact did not mention Papua, we note that given the GOI's vehement objection to Australia's decision to grant temporary visa's to Papuan asylum seekers, it is likely another reason the GOI will be hesitant to be seen as promoting asylum for the Burmese. End Note).

¶4. (SBU) The 77 are unlikely to depart in the near future because the Indonesian Navy cannot immediately provide fuel and the seas are currently high and rough. Meanwhile, the Indonesian Navy has housed the Burmese in a warehouse and the local Red Cross is providing clothing, food and medical care as needed.

PASCOE